



Executive Summary

Educational Service Unit #17

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Description of the Agency.....	2
Agency's Purpose.....	3
Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement.....	4
Additional Information	6

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Introduction

Every agency has its own story to tell. The context in which teaching and learning takes place influences the processes and procedures by which the agency makes decisions around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The context also impacts the way a agency stays faithful to its vision. Many factors contribute to the overall narrative such as an identification of stakeholders, a description of stakeholder engagement, the trends and issues affecting the agency, and the kinds of programs and services that an agency implements to support student learning.

The purpose of the Executive Summary (ES) is to provide an agency with an opportunity to describe in narrative form the strengths and challenges it encounters. By doing so, the public and members of the community will have a more complete picture of how the agency perceives itself and the process of self-reflection for continuous improvement. This summary is structured for the agency to reflect on how it provides teaching and learning on a day to day basis.

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Description of the Agency

Describe the agency's size, community/communities, location, and changes it has experienced in the last three years. Include demographic information about the students (if applicable), staff, and community at large. What unique features and challenges are associated with the schools/systems the agency serves?

Educational Service Unit #17 is located in Ainsworth in north central Nebraska. The administration building, located on Main Street in downtown Ainsworth, houses the business office and special education department. The technology center, located on Highway 20 on the eastern edge of Ainsworth houses the technology, media, and staff development departments, and Nebraska ESU Cooperative Purchasing. Cherry County itinerate special education staff members have office space on N Main Street in Valentine, 45 miles west of Ainsworth. Overall, ESU #17 employs 25 staff members, 15 of which are special education positions.

According to the 2010 national census, ESU #17 service area consists of four sparsely-populated counties (Brown, Cherry, Keya Paha, and Rock). ESU #17 is approximately 5,600 square miles in size and has a population of 11,000 people, which has been steadily declining at a 1% rate annually.

ESU #17 has five member school districts that educate 1,595 students. The student population is 88.4% White, 6.08% American Indian, 2.63% two or more races, and 2.19% Hispanic; 13.1% Special Education and 45.99% Free and Reduced Meals. There is a 10.55% mobility rate and a graduation rate of 95.53%. Over 95% of high school teachers are properly endorsed for the courses they teach.

Communities served include Ainsworth, Bassett (Rose), Cody (Kilgore), Springview, and Valentine (Wood Lake). Although ESU #17 is geographically comparable in size to other education service agencies in Nebraska, it serves the smallest population. There is no population center over 3,000.

Four of the five schools districts are located on Highway 20 over a distance of approximately 100 miles from west to east. Cody-Kilgore, in central Cherry County is 83 miles from Ainsworth, and is also located in the Mountain Time Zone.

Although the student population is declining in enrollment, it is becoming more diverse. In addition to an increasing Free and Reduced Meals population, the ethnic diversity is growing (even though the White population is nearly 90%). The most significant challenge, however, appears to be increasing behavioral issues, which schools are not adequately prepared to address.

Most school districts have eliminated staffing positions through attrition, and through the closing of rural attendance centers due to limited funding. Most districts have also expressed varying degrees of technology infrastructure deficiencies.

In spite of these statistics and trends, students perform above the state average on NeSA tests, and above the national average on NWEA MAP and ACT tests, often with increasing proficiency.

Agency's Purpose

Provide the agency's purpose statement and ancillary content such as mission, vision, values, and/or beliefs. Describe how the agency embodies its purpose through its services, program offerings and expectations for the schools/systems served.

In Board Policy, the agency has the following official Mission Statement: "The mission of ESU #17 is to provide innovation, leadership and services for each member school district so they are successful in reaching their targeted educational goals." (Board Policy Article 1, Section 1B, August 11, 2009)

The Purpose Statement of Educational Service Unit #17 is "ESU #17 is committed to partnering with its schools by providing support and resources to enhance teaching and learning." (adopted by agency staff and stakeholders May 1, 2007, reaffirmed May 18, 2012)

The Vision Statement of Educational Service Unit #17 is "ESU #17 will become a collaborative community addressing the academic, social, emotional, physical, and professional development needs of our stakeholders. We aspire to support overall student learning through continuous improvement and innovative practices in education." (adopted by agency staff January 4, 2011, revised February 3, 2012)

Purpose Through Services

- > Purpose through services
- > Purpose through program offerings
- > Purpose through expectations
- > Data driven (writing)

Living the Vision <http://esu17advanced.wikispaces.com/Vision+Statement>

Collaborative - Focus Interviews, Advisory Council Meetings, Department Reviews, School Stakeholder Surveys, Staff Meetings

Notable Achievements and Areas of Improvement

Describe the agency's notable achievements and areas of improvement in the last three years. Additionally, describe areas for improvement that the agency is striving to achieve in the next three years.

Achievements

ESU #17 has impacted learning experiences in schools by encouraging and supporting distance learning courses (including the agreement on a similar bell schedule) and coordinating the updating and functionality of distance learning equipment. We are currently in the process of installing a network bridge, made possible in part through a RUS grant award, which will increase the capacity of distance learning connectivity at local and regional/state levels.

In Fall 2010, all service area school districts created and collectively joined an ESU #17 NWEA MAP consortium, with ESU #17 serving as fiscal agent. MAP assessments are used both as a formative tool to identify students' academic progress levels in reading, mathematics, general science, and concepts and processes, and as a summative reporting tool for state-required annual achievement testing.

Although seemingly minor, scheduling three staff meetings per year in which to conduct AdvancED-related reflection and improvement activities for our agency has noticeably impacted our focus on what matters. Prior to 2010 our agency typically had an opening day meeting in which to process paperwork, which was the only time that our staff was together. We now have a Leadership Team that meets regularly to plan activities for agency staff meetings, takes part in facilitating these activities at meetings, and also makes decisions that allow us to move forward toward continuous improvement. Staff meetings also provide us with an opportunity to involve stakeholders, including Board members, school district administrators, and others, in order to gain from their shared perspectives. We have begun the process of reviewing student-level data to identify areas where we can provide targeted support.

Finally, recent physical improvements to agency structures have made our facilities more functional and aesthetic. The most recent major change was the relocation of the Media Center (formerly in Valentine) to the Technology Center in Ainsworth. The most positive benefit to this move has been to house all core service departments (media, staff development, and technology) under one roof, which provides a better collaborative environment.

Areas of Improvement

As the agency staff reviewed the Standards during a Self Assessment activity, it became apparent that ESU #17 does not have a structured professional learning program or a consistent evaluation process. Although professional development is encouraged and supported, there is no intentional alignment exists that involves professional development, evaluation, and agency effectiveness.

The ESU #17 Staff Perception Survey indicated that communication channels with member schools were appropriate; however, the School Stakeholder Survey indicated that there are several aspects of communication that are underperforming, specifically: formal discussions regarding services and programs, agency progress on improvement goals, and student learning statistics. School personnel are also unaware of how the agency uses stakeholder feedback and how funding sources and other resources are utilized to benefit all constituents.

Additionally, school stakeholders communicate that technology infrastructure support is a need; however, most districts do not opt to contract for this service.

Future Improvements

- > Transition to online-only media resources
- > Training podcasts available 24/7
- > Greater physical presence through onsite delivery and support at member schools
- > Improved internet infrastructure at member schools
- > Improved level of information communicated to member schools

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Additional Information

Provide any additional information you would like to share with the public and community that were not prompted in the previous sections.

Once the agency Board approved the staff's request to pursue AdvancED accreditation, a Wikispaces site was created to document and organize agency activities. The URL for this website is <http://www.esu17advanced.wikispaces.com>.

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